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ABSTRACT

Academic curricula in the humanities should lead the student to develop "shared values," which include cultivating the intellect, acquiring critical skills, gaining an understanding of humanity, and learning to make reasoned choices. Toward this goal, the curriculum should strive to preserve the independent quest for truth through textual analysis (devoid of ideological tendencies). Debate arises over whether the focus of humanities curriculum should be on Western culture or a curriculum that focuses on changing global situations and emphasizes both Western and non-Western cultures. What is essential is that the needs of both the student and the community be met by the humanities curriculum. The objective of the curriculum should be made clear in order for personal enrichment to take place and for the student to realize the contribution the study of the humanities makes towards their development both personally and occupationally. A curriculum which takes a community-based approach to teaching integrated humanities would be the most successful in developing individuals who are able to work with others, solve problems, make decisions, and adapt to changing environments. The community should be encouraged to share with students the impact that the study of the humanities has had on their personal and professional lives in order to make clear the importance of integrating the study of humanities with career education. (VVC)

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TOWARD SHARED VALUES IN THE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE HUMANITIES CURRICULUM

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TOWARD SHARED VALUES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE HUMANITIES CURRICULUM

Introduction

The renewed interest in the humanities continues to grow rapidly in the United States, for there has been a rediscovery of the contributions that humanistic values can make in a pluralistic society. Many Americans believe in and search for those values in education, economics, business, and politics. This new enthusiasm also aims at combating cultural illiteracy. Not only do special commissions and the universities decry cultural illiteracy, they also make recommendations to increase public awareness, organize effective programs, and reinforce the curricula in the humanities. But while the contributions and humanistic studies can make to the individual and to the society are overwhelmingly acknowledged and desired, how the college curriculum will increase those contributions is still a much debated issue. Areas of serious debate include the content of the humanities curriculum, methods of teaching, approaches to critical analysis, and maintaining "shared values." For instance, not all teachers of the humanities adhere to the principles of "shared values," and some of those who do seem to have taken a provincial approach to it. But most teachers of the humanities will agree that academic curricula in the humanities should lead the student to develop certain competencies. The curriculum should strive to preserve independent quest for the truth through textual analysis (devoid of ideological tendencies), leading the student to the cultivation of the intellect, acquisition of critical skills, in-depth knowledge of humanity, and ability to make reasoned choices. The attainment of this intellectual growth is what the phrase "shared values" means in this paper.

New Enthusiasm for the Humanities

When one studies the history of the humanities in higher education in the United States in the last three decades, one discovers that philosophical and ideological controversies concerning the humanities curriculum have always been prevalent. Recently, those controversies have been reinforced by new scholarly and theoretical developments, and there have been special commissions to look into the state of the humanities in the United States, each commission studying and reporting how the humanities have been disseminated in both social and academic institutions. The tones of recent reports on the state of the humanities, however, have been somewhat acrimonious, indicating factionalism among the humanists themselves. Two recently published reports identify such factionalism. On the one hand is the argument that the humanities curriculum in American colleges and universities should focus primarily on Western culture. On the other hand is the position that the changing global situations call for a curriculum that emphasizes both Western and other cultures; materials from other cultures should be integrated into the humanities curriculum, not as tokenism but as a viable source of knowledge, having equal recognition as traditional texts. Those who advocate this position also call for a new way to interpret traditional texts.

In September 1988, the National Endowment for the Humanities published a report called Humanities in America. The report, praising the general public for increased programming in the humanities and criticizing academic institutions for doing less, explained the agency's position on the humanities. Lynne V. Cheney, Chairman of the agency and the author of the report, argues:

It is not possible to make such a positive assessment when one looks at our colleges and universities. At the same time that public interest in the humanities has grown, study of these disciplines has declined among formally enrolled students. Between 1966 and 1986, a period in which the number of bachelor's degrees awarded increased by 88 percent, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in the humanities declined 33 percent. Foreign language majors dropped by 29 percent; English majors, by 33 percent; philosophy majors, by 35 percent; and history majors, by 43 percent. (4)

The report further states that in "the academy, the humanities have become arcane;"¹ that "As specialization becomes ever narrower, the humanities tend to lose their significance and centrality;"² that "achievements in the classroom have counted less than scholarly monographs and articles in professional journals;"³ and that "Viewing humanities texts as though they were primarily political documents is the most noticeable trend in academic study of the humanities today."⁴ And the solution recommended by Cheney was the "Colleges and universities should work toward intellectually coherent curricula."⁵ Apart from being a report on the state of the humanities, Humanities in America is, to date, one of the harshest criticisms of the way American colleges and universities have disseminated the humanities.

In response to this criticism, a group of directors of humanities centers and professors of humanities at major American universities issued a statement published by the American Council of Learned Societies as Speaking for the Humanities. This report, called most of Lynne Cheney's criticism of the academy, "off the mark," optimistically postulates that "We are living... through a revival of the humanities on campuses where until recently the focus of students was overwhelmingly on business and technological studies";⁶ that

"The proliferation of humanities centers on university campuses in recent years is one sign of a desire on the part of scholars to communicate with colleagues in other fields, to exchange results of thinking within particular disciplines, and to break down disciplinary boundaries in their research;"⁷ that in studying the canon of Western culture, "We should not equate truth with our own political ideology;"⁸ that "the best work characteristic of the humanities today has renewed debates on value, indeed on the ethics of what we study and how we study it;"⁹ that "popular culture, instead of being excoriated as the cause of the degeneration of youth might be made part of contemporary education;"¹⁰ and that "one of the reasons there is so much activity on matters of teaching and curriculum within universities is that change is so very difficult to effect."¹¹ Speaking for the Humanities affirms that all sources of knowledge, such as the materials studies in the humanities, incorporate peculiar biases, galvanized by self-interest and self-perpetuating ideologies, cloaked in the context of universals. The report advocates the study of the traditional texts in their historical, social, and ideological contexts.

One would have thought that these arguments will lead to disarray and cause confusion, but that is not the case. From these debates, new ideas that can greatly benefit curriculum planners have emerged, formulating a new paradigm for critical analysis that can help humanities teachers and their students. When designing or revamping a curriculum, one should be familiar with the two views of the humanities expressed in Humanities in America and Speaking for the Humanities. Doing so has several advantages. First, familiarity with these position statements will assist the humanities teacher to formulate specific objectives for a program in the humanities. Second, these scholarly debates serve as a paradigm for the kind of intellectual exercise that characterizes the study of the humanities. If the question of curriculum could generate these

much complex arguments, then the content of the curriculum itself will be expected to lead to varied view points on both method of interpretation and the difficulty of deriving meaning. Finally, the on-going curricular controversy among humanists validates the importance of the humanities to our colleges and universities. Also, the new perspectives that emerge from these controversy enable the humanities faculty to explore new dimensions in formulating the curricula that are responsive to student's needs.

What impacts has this curricular controversy had on the humanities curriculum in the community college? Generally, some of the reports issued by various commissions on the humanities devoted some sections to the community college. For example, The Humanities in American Life: Report of the Commission on the Humanities, issued in April 1989, devoted one of its thirty-one recommendations to the community college. The authors of the report put it this way:

We join the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, the Community College Humanities Association, and the assembly convened in November 1979 by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in recommending that community colleges (and, we would add, other institutions offering technical and vocational training) organize interested members of the local community into lay advisory committees to help integrate the humanities with career education. These groups should include representatives from the trade advisory councils and other agencies that establish requirements for vocational education. As role models, placement advisors, and recruiting agents, the members of these advisory committees can act as advocates for the humanities among occupational students and the community. (119)

This report made a significant contribution to the advancement of the humanities in the United States, for it emphasized, among other things, the indispensable role of the community in the planning, implementation, and administration of the humanities.

In the light of recent developments, also, specific reports have been issued to address the situation of the humanities in the community college curriculum. In October 1988, for example, four affiliate councils of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges published "Integrating the Humanities into Associate Degree Occupational Programs: A Final Report of the Shared Vision Task Force." This report defined "Shared Vision" in relation to the mission of the community college:

It is envisioned that the Humanities will be accepted as a viable and integral component of two-year occupational curricula when occupational students, faculty, and administrators are presented with the evidence that employers value the contributions of the Humanities to occupational preparation. Equally important, when Humanities faculties understand that the achievement of specific learning outcomes resulting from the study of the humanities does contribute to workplace performance, they will examine course content to assure that those specific outcomes are included. At the same time occupational faculties will examine their institutional programs to assure that these specific outcomes, beyond proficiency in communication and technical skills, are included in their curricula goals and the humanities integrated into those programs. This is the "Shared Vision." (2)

"Shared Vision," as defined above, called for cooperation between the faculties of the humanities and technologies in matters of curriculum planning and implementation. In this respect, the principle of "shared values" has been creatively linked to the integration of occupational and academic humanities. In the survey conducted for the report, employers expressed their opinions on the contributions they believed the study of the humanities could make to business enterprises. Based on those opinions, they recommended strong cooperation between faculties of the humanities and technologies.

The Goal Is To Educate

While there is no consensus among the humanists themselves on what should be included or excluded from the humanities curriculum or a solid agreement between the faculties of the humanities and technologies concerning degree requirements, these educators do believe that the student should learn to know. Yet the task of imparting knowledge should not be carried out in isolation from the educator's familiarity with the need of the student. One must be cognizant, for instance, of the fact that the community college represents the highest ideal in the attempt to democratize American higher education. As a result, the community college clientele, enrolling through open door policy, vary significantly in age and purpose for enrollment. There are those who work and attend school, single parents, people who need temporary job training to increase chances of getting jobs, transfer students, continuing students, and some others in between.

Whatever the case may be, the humanities curriculum should make an attempt to meet the student's intellectual needs. This premise is similar to the position taken by a group of scholars who reviewed the condition of the

humanities in the University of North Carolina system. The humanities curriculum should be organized, the reviewers concluded, in such a way as to effectuate "the development of the individual."¹² The ultimate aim of the humanities is neither to defend any ideology, domestic or foreign, nor to achieve idealistic world citizenship. Rather, the goal and the intent of the humanities is to educate the individual to make enlightened choices in complex matters of personal development, heritage, tradition, information, belief, life style, and cultural values.

How can the student accomplish this goal? Jacob Neusner, despite his aversion to non-traditional contents of the humanities curricula at his university, still believes that democratic approaches to higher education inevitably calls for broader sources of knowledge and that the one goal that is worth striving for, in that situation, is teaching the student to think. He explains:

More generally, what we teach students, through any subject, is about thinking, about using their minds for specific tasks. The curriculum then consists of two components: first, the information we offer, which students learn, and, second, our example of how we compose that information into intelligible propositions and arguments about possibilities, which students may choose to imitate and improve. Whether we teach undergraduate or graduate students, the issue is the same. Students should be concerned with modes of analysis and means of interpretation, through which they learn the particulars of information. (44)

The question, then, is not only one of the approach used in organizing a curriculum as it is of the intention of the curriculum for the student. In that

case, the curriculum should have the potential to lead the student to the cultivation of the intellect, examination of various sources of knowledge, and appreciation of humanity.

The Curriculum Should Cultivate the Intellect

The cultivation of the intellect is the foundation upon which other contributions of the humanities rest; therefore, the content of any humanities curriculum should be profoundly relevant in its delineation of human condition. The search for intellectual growth in thought and self-expression, through such a curricula, has always been the humanistic ideal and begins from "self-knowledge and self-realization."¹³ Thus, "The end of [general education] would seem to be...the transformation of the young and unformed, not into adjusted members of an unsound society, nor into tools for service in ever multiplying vocations defined by the division of labor, but into mature human beings, men, and women of understanding and integrity."¹⁴ In a curriculum modeled to attain this objective, the student will be reminded that "books came into the world not dead but as 'quick thought,' and should beget quick thought, spurring the [student] to fresh creation."¹⁵

For personal enrichment to take place, the curriculum should have a specific objective, based on a clear mission statement. The parties involved in creating the curriculum should determine at the onset the emphasis of the program. Is cultural literacy alone the objective of the curriculum? Or is the curriculum designed to teach the student in developing his or her abilities to think and decide from reasoned conclusions? Indeed, any humanities curriculum should strive toward achieving both objectives. But only a well constructed, balanced curriculum will definitely achieve both. Nevertheless, a strong possibility exists that a curriculum may become nothing but a means to achieving

cultural literacy, at the expense of personal refinement. In that case, the student learns and memorizes avidly historical documents, battles, dates, events, biographies, names of literary figures, places, slogans, with little understanding of and less insight into the significance of those facts. The AACJC Humanities Policy Statement puts this succinctly: "Instruction in the humanities must engage students extensively in activities that take them beyond the mere acquisition of facts and the comprehension of principles and theories" (2). Of what good is it to know the name of a country and its capital city when one refuses to know about the people who created the country and its capital? Notwithstanding, student sophistication in the humanities depends on the purpose established in the curriculum.

The final report of the "Shared Vision Task Force" explains how important it is to formulate a purpose for occupational programs that include the humanities as an integral part of the degree requirement. The purpose of such a program should be to realize the contribution that the study of the humanities can make toward the student and to educate the student to be a living proof of that purpose. The "contributions are considered significant because they play a vital role in strengthening a student's performance in the workplace by better enabling a student to work with others, solve problems, make decisions, and adapt to an ever changing environment"¹⁶.

In the attempt to lead the student to intellectual development, the studies of world literature, history, philosophy, anthropology, to mention a few, are indispensable. Furthermore, classical literature, the Holy Bible, the Koran, The Kena-Upanishad, epic poetry, national literatures, as well as contemporary culture contain both aesthetic and thematic complexities that require rigorous explications and methodical elucidations. The thematic approach to studying literature, for example, tend to motivate the student to express personal views

on a topic. Also, this method enhances the effectiveness of group discussion, for members of a group are likely to compete with one another in expressing their opinions, especially if the group is subdivided, with each group researching a small topic from a broad theme. The thematic approach to analyzing a text offers a comparative perspective, among students themselves, on whatever the topic may be.

One of the most ubiquitous themes in literature is human relationships, in all their varied dimensions--personal and interpersonal, national and international. This theme is elemental indeed. Yet introducing the study of literature from this common theme can open a vista in the way a student thinks about literature. Let us place Aeschylus' Oresteia trilogy within this vista. In this monumental work, we see myriad roles which most humans play in their life time--leader, patriot, father, mother, wife, mistress, daughter, son, brother, sister, friend, juror, neighbor, citizen, soldier, follower, etc. These roles and the relationships they form transcend time and geography and, when presented to students, can stimulate a great deal of intellectual curiosity. The proper study of the "Great Books" offers no less challenge to the student's curiosity. Even for a literary work that is not as famous as the "Great Books", the experience can be the same. Take Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God, for example. In this short novel, a powerful political leader, in utter frustration, broods over the nature of his political powers which, if they were to be exercised fully, will result in the virtual destruction of his people. "Of what good is power when one cannot use it?" he asks. This contemporary Nigerian novel raises many questions about advantages and disadvantages of superpower and the principle of checks and balances in a democracy. If the

common denominator is human relationships, the humanist teacher can adopt a thematic approach to study the texts, and the student will develop a broader view of life.

Examination of Learning Sources

The criteria for selecting materials for the humanities curriculum should be based on the objectives to be achieved in each course. If a broad theme has been selected for a particular course, then all the materials to be used in that course should contribute to the understanding of that theme. Be it a book, a piece of art, a film, or a music score, the primary source should engage the attention of the student, leading to reflection and culminating into further inquiries. The curriculum should encourage reading, writing, speaking, and how to analyze a text to draw conclusions. The student's critical skills develop rapidly when established critical materials that accompany primary sources are presented as alternate view points rather than absolutes. Such critical sources should be used, not to intimidate or stifle personal expression, but to stimulate the student's creative interpretations and meanings.

The thematic approach to the study of literary texts, supported by guided instructions, allows sharpened perceptions. Students eagerly accept difficult challenge of resolving complex moral and ethical problems raised by a text when their views are recognized and appreciated. The recognition of individual contribution to a discussion of a thought-provoking topic further motivates the student to pay close attention to the subtleties of a text. To make the humanities curriculum responsive to the personal development of the student, the atmosphere in the classroom should encourage freedom of thought and tolerance of different opinions. While the exploration of the humanities may involve the defense of and belief in a proposition, it ought to lead to its ultimate aim of

developing new consciousness in the individual, leaving him or her unfettered by conventional assumptions and prejudices.

Appreciation of Culture

The appreciation of culture should be an integral part of the curriculum, with a statement of strategy to attain it. There are several ways to accomplish this via the curriculum. First, systematic explication of texts often leads to the discovery of the beauty in both subject and the art of its presentation. The student can apply to popular culture the skills developed in the critical analysis of texts. This exercise culminates into ability to critique and appreciate contemporary texts and popular culture in general. Second, a curriculum should include the study and discussion of other cultures. This could be done through the reading of literature from other cultures, inviting persons who have understanding of a particular culture to make presentations to an academic class, sponsoring study abroad programs, inviting international students to give presentations about their countries, and devoting discussion times to contemporary, substantive issues from around the world. In fact, the recommended curriculum ("50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students") from the National Endowment for the Humanities, reported in the October 11, 1989 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education, included the study of African, Asian, and Latin American civilizations. Third, the curriculum should be responsive to ethnic cultures within the United States, providing the student an opportunity to design a project that focuses on a particular ethnic custom. It could be the recording and documentation of the vanishing heritage of an ethnic group. For example, the construction of an anthology of a given dialect, music, literature, etc. can lead to a sense of responsibility and accomplishment on the part of the student. This exercise also holds potential for creating in the

student a sense of purpose and the satisfaction associated with ability to preserve a heritage. Through such assignment, the student learns about the process of preservation, forming a new attitude toward the existing materials. Finally, it is essential to integrate regional and local cultures into the academic curriculum. The awareness of regional differences in language, music, art, literature, etc. holds a world of wealth for a growing generation that often takes it for granted. The appreciation of the differences in regional, ethnic, and generational cultures, through comparisons, may help the student define his own life.

The community college humanities curriculum should meet the cultural needs of the community and, by doing so, encourage the community's continued funding, appreciation, and participation. The humanities program should utilize the community resources by bringing to campus community leaders in business, local government, and education. The participation of these persons in on-campus programs or through print or electronic media will enhance the integrity of the humanities, especially when these persons testify to the contributions which the study of the humanities has made to their lives.

Indeed, the humanities teachers and administrators should find ways to get the community involved in their program. One way to bring members of the community to campus is to include the performing arts in the humanities curriculum. Students could produce plays as a part of their academic work. The college could bring a theater troupe to campus. A lecture series could be organized and well advertised in the community. A discussion period could follow such a lecture to give the audience an opportunity to participate. To maintain this kind of relationship between a humanities program and the people in the community, humanities teachers may conduct surveys periodically to gauge the changing needs and expectations of the citizens and their attitudes toward

the humanities in general and toward specific projects in particular. Findings from these surveys will enable the humanities faculty to modify the approaches used to ensure effectiveness and relevance of the program.

Conclusion

A humanities curriculum designed primarily for the intellectual development of the student truly affirms the utmost intent of the humanities. The efforts to increase or improve courses in the humanities in the community college might focus on designing a curriculum that employs both traditional and experimental approaches to pedagogy, ensuring compatibility with the mission of the college and the need of the student. The needs of both the student and the community should serve as a guide for the planners of a humanities curriculum to set realistic goals. A community-based approach to teaching integrated humanities could produce the best results. Business, civic, and educational leaders should be encouraged to be involved in sharing with the student the contributions that the study of the humanities has made to their personal and professional lives. When all the components of the humanities curriculum are implemented with creative vitality, the humanities will continue their mission of cultivating the mind.

NOTES

¹ Lynne V. Cheney, Humanities in America: A Report to the President, the Congress, and the American People (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1988) 7.

² Ibid., p. 8.

³ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

⁶ George Levine, et al., Speaking for the Humanities (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1989) 1.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 18.

¹² Norman Foerster, "The Future of the Humanities in State Universities," A State University Surveys the Humanities, ed. Loren C. MacKinney, et al. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1945) 207.

¹³ Foerster, p. 208.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 209-210.

¹⁶ Shared Vision Task Force, Integrating the Humanities Into Associate Degree Occupational Programs: Final Report of the Shared Vision Task Force (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1989) 7.

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